

Air defense platoon leader checking  
Patriot launcher coverage on range  
during *Joint Red Flag 2005*



# Joint Professionals Here Today, Here to Stay

By MICHAEL A. COSS

**T**he Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 revamped joint officer management policies to improve the quality of officers serving on joint staffs, the advice given to the Secretary of Defense, and the effectiveness of military operations. Joint officer management was one of the most contentious parts of that seminal legislation, but it established the educational, training, and operational basis for developing joint warfighting professionals who are adept at

leveraging the capabilities of the entire force to accomplish missions and tasks across the spectrum of conflict. Indeed, the professional skills that emerged are largely responsible for recent military successes and portend continued excellence and vitality within the joint profession.

Troops who fought together during *Iraqi Freedom* are now training together to further enhance their joint capabilities at the point of the spear. The services are modularizing their forces, making them more dependent on the capabilities of the other services to create operational effects that directly contribute to achieving objectives. Also, combatant commands are reviewing strategic war plans, and the Joint Staff is revamping weapons

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procurement processes to improve strategic capabilities. Joint operations are here to stay, and while the joint officer management system and joint organizations are not perfect, they do not require the major changes some have argued for.

### The Joint Profession

It has taken nearly a generation to grow a cadre of joint officers and a body of joint knowledge, but managing this within a new joint warfare profession as described by Don Snider would undermine the progress made thus far. Snider is correct in identifying symptoms of the glacial pace of change, but his solutions are questionable. He calls for legislation to create a new joint warfare profession, a new joint doctrine and education command, and a new joint personnel command.<sup>1</sup>

This article argues that we already have a joint profession and the processes to develop and manage the body of joint knowledge. It argues further that we do not need another joint bureaucracy to manage the personnel system. Rather, we need to stay the course and continue to diffuse jointness broadly and to the lowest levels possible. Only in this manner can we develop the largest, most competent set of joint professionals to wage modern war. From there we can develop and manage the associated knowledge and jurisdictions of the profession. Future conflicts will increasingly be characterized by decentralized operations, where interdependent joint capabilities and associated forces provide key advantages.

A good definition for *joint professionals* would be those who are schooled in and practice the unique and expert competencies of joint warfare, and respond to its calling with moral service to the nation.<sup>2</sup> Joint warfare must also have “full authority over its own internal jurisdictions for the creation and adaptation of the profession’s expert knowledge, and for the development and utilization of joint professionals.”<sup>3</sup>

Current processes achieve this. An explicit process develops joint doctrine that provides and adapts the body of expert knowledge for this profession, and joint officer management policies and statutes provide for the development and utilization of the joint professionals themselves. And while these processes can be improved, they certainly meet the definitional characteristics required for a joint profession.

### Status of the Joint Profession

Contemporary analysis of Operations *Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom* suggests we are closer to realizing the joint warfight than ever before. Congressional testimony by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and former Commander, U.S. Central Command, General Tommy Franks, USA, attributed operational success to the unprecedented jointness demonstrated by the entire force. At the tactical level, Soldiers and Airmen interoperated much better than in previous conflicts, and General Franks developed an operational plan that relied on pushing jointness to increasingly lower levels. Additionally, recent testimony by both Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM), who was in charge of collecting lessons learned, and Army War College historians and other analysts who conducted extensive research in theater also attributed the operational success to the unprecedented level of jointness exhibited during the operations.

Conflicts require commanders who are skilled in their profession, are capable of commanding and controlling their organizations and formations, and can exploit new technological capabilities. During *Iraqi Freedom*, and increasingly since passage of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, success has depended on commanders who had joint expertise, commanded joint organizations, and had access to interoperable joint capabilities. In fact, modern warfare will continue to require a robust body of expert warfighters who are capable of using interoperable technologies networked across the joint force to achieve optimal solutions that apply all of the joint arms.

Providing these expert warfighters requires the means to develop and manage the internal jurisdictions of the profession. These include the body of expert knowledge and the experts themselves, but joint processes already capture the former by codifying the innovations with broad and enduring application into joint doctrine. And other joint processes, including the biannual review of the Unified Command Plan, implement changes to joint organizations and missions to better meet our global responsibilities.

In a similar effort, JFCOM is reviewing the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq to explore doctrine and organizational changes, and parallel efforts are under way to strengthen the command's role as the joint doctrine center for the entire force. The joint force is actively managing and adapting its internal jurisdictions over this body of expert knowledge.

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Joint processes also provide adequate means to develop and manage the joint warfighting experts. These include education and training standards, joint assignment criteria, and quality controls that provide joint force commanders high caliber officers. Given these facts, a total re-vamping of the joint profession does not appear necessary as it was just prior to the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

### Emerging Joint Culture

The joint force has moved beyond the point where congressional action forced it to assign quality officers to joint billets. As a profession, the force has begun to manifest jointness in very principled ways. Joint culture shows how the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the joint profession have evolved to mirror the evolution of joint warfare.

**Regional combatant commands almost invariably develop fully integrated plans using the capabilities of each service**

There have traditionally been four cultures—products of four services that tended to fight separately. As technology advanced, it became prudent and often necessary to

develop doctrine to deconflict the battlespace among the services by, for instance, establishing a fire support coordination line to separate air and ground fires from ground forces.

In the 1980s, jointness started becoming a means to a more effective end. The AirLand Battle doctrine was progressive because it recognized the interdependent relationships air and land power had in defeating Soviet forces on the plains of Europe.

Likewise, today's Army officers recognize their dependence on Air Force and Navy assets to provide more effective fires and conduct operational maneuver from strategic distances. Developing further trust is critical because these interdependencies will remain relevant given recent operations and emerging joint concepts. Conversely, Air Force and Navy operational fires, particularly aircraft, can be more effective when Army forces flush targets from restrictive and urban terrain or force them to mass, as demonstrated during recent conflicts.

As the authors intended, war planning has also become more joint since the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Regional combatant commands, which are primarily responsible for developing and managing such plans, almost invariably develop fully integrated plans using the capabilities of each service. This interdependence continues

to make warfare more joint as it reshapes the attitudes, values, and beliefs of our profession.

Service identities remain strong and at the center of our capabilities, but they have been assuming a joint perspective to meet new warfighting requirements. Indeed, service cultures are adapting to the whole joint force.

The intent of the Goldwater-Nichols Act was to leverage the capabilities of the individual services to more effectively meet the requirements of the joint force as a whole. The operational challenge now is to take this to the level of joint interdependency, where service capabilities are combined to maximize their total capacity, reinforcing their effects while minimizing their relative vulnerabilities.

The key provisions of the act established clear authorities for joint commanders and legislated a specific process to develop and manage joint expertise within the officer corps. It clarified these authorities by placing the combatant commanders directly under the Secretary of Defense and requiring the services to assign all their combat forces to them. It established means to develop and manage joint expertise by legislating educational standards for the joint force, requirements for joint utilization tours, and specific standards to control the quality of joint officers. After nearly two decades, these factors have developed a joint profession, and we should examine them individually before recommending further improvements.

### Organizations

The Goldwater-Nichols Act placed new emphasis on joint organizations, empowered their commanders, and resourced them with quality officers from each service. This has contributed to the emergence of the joint profession. The emphasis on joint organizations recognized the necessity of employing integrated force packages. Lessons from the Vietnam War demonstrated that the Department of Defense (DOD) was not properly organized to achieve the level of interoperability required.

Placing the combatant commands directly below the Secretary in the chain of command and giving them authority to reorganize and command their forces have largely resolved this issue. Combatant commanders and subordinate joint task force (JTF) commanders have exercised this authority in their assigned missions, demonstrating the important contribution this reorganization offers. These joint organizations provide





USS Nassau (Brian McFadden)

**Army Apache lifting off USS Nassau during joint shipboard weapons and ordnance training, February 2005**

the structure in which quality officers from each service practice the craft of joint warfighting.

New joint processes were another outgrowth of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. The legislation sought to provide the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and combatant commanders a stronger voice in determining requirements. The Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC), Military Education Coordinating Committee, and integrated priority lists are examples of joint processes codified after the act was passed. While these processes are not flawless, they help require the services to advance their interests within the joint context.

This trend continues with the publication of *Joint Operations Concepts*, which provides a vision of future joint warfare and a conceptual framework from which future capability needs will be determined. Similarly, the Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS),

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which replaces the requirements generation system, utilizes joint concepts, validated by experimentation, to derive and assess critical capabilities from a joint and operational perspective and then determine capability gaps, shortfalls, and redundancies.

Both *Joint Operations Concepts* and JCIDS further strengthen the Chairman's and combatant commanders' influence in developing joint capabilities. Each provides a means of grading the services in meeting joint capability needs and encourages them to develop "born-joint" solutions. They further the development of joint culture and provide additional means for joint professionals to practice their craft.

## Education and Training

The education and training of joint officers provide the foundation for enhancing these organizations and processes. The Goldwater-Nichols Act established joint officer management policies and joint professional military education programs that required subsequent employment in joint-coded billets. To establish and maintain quality across service programs, it also required the Secretary to revise the curriculum of each school periodically "to strengthen the focus on joint matters and on preparing officers for joint duty assignments." Such refinements have essentially established an education process for the joint force, including general and flag officers.

First, service staff colleges expose selected officers to the fundamentals of jointness prior to joint assignments. Students learn about joint



20th Communications Squadron (Veronica Fullwood)

**Pre-mission briefing on operational and tactical effectiveness through joint integrated training**

organizations and processes and how to meet the strategic and operational requirements of combatant commands. Additionally, Joint Forces Staff College (National Defense University at Norfolk, Virginia) provides officers more detailed education while they are assigned or en route to joint billets. It provides in-depth exposure to the processes and procedures they will need to function in combatant command headquarters.

Next, the senior service colleges and the National Defense University's National War College and Industrial College of the Armed Forces teach the strategic art of developing and practicing national security strategy and policy and of commanding joint organizations. Finally, general and flag officers receive further instruction on how to plan and employ forces in joint and combined operations in a variety of courses and continuing educational programs.

This training helps prepare officers to serve in joint billets, but actually serving is the primary means for developing the appreciation and expertise for employing the joint force. Before detailing the benefits of this on-the-job-training, how well does the joint curriculum prepare officers for joint assignments?

Instruction at the captain/major and lieutenant/lieutenant commander level provides the basics of national military capabilities and command structure, joint doctrine, joint and multinational forces at the operational level, joint planning and execution processes, and information

operations. It also introduces national security and military strategy in developing theater strategies, theater engagement and campaign planning with joint and multinational and interagency organizations, the Joint Strategic Planning System, the Joint Operations Planning and Execution System, and operational-level battlespace systems integration through deliberate and crisis planning.

These subjects are addressed more fully at the senior service colleges and the National Defense University, where military leaders prepare for joint service at the highest levels. These venues educate leaders on national security responsibilities in joint, multinational, and interagency settings—what is now called integrated operations—through teaching, research, and outreach.

Finally, the general/flag officer instruction teaches national security strategy and the joint operational art. The first overall joint flag course is known as Capstone, an intensive 6-week course examining national security decisionmaking, military strategy, joint/combined doctrine, interoperability, and allied-nation issues. The JFCOM role as the joint force trainer and integrator has led the command to host a portion of the Capstone training so all rising flag officers receive more specific instruction on how to operate as JTF commanders. It also conducts refresher training for all selected three-star commanders consistent with its view that the business of flag officers is commanding joint formations.

Such training is necessary but not sufficient. It teaches the basic structures, organizations, and statutes on which the joint system is founded but cannot deliver the in-depth warfighting knowledge joint commanders need. That comes only after an officer is well versed in the skills of his service and rises to a level where he applies those skills in a joint context. A fundamental strength of our system is that the services provide the joint community with officers who are adept at their service core competencies prior to developing joint competencies.

The services teach the basic skills the joint force requires. It is akin to offensive blocking and defensive tackling in football where the groups must master their fundamentals, play as a team, and depend on each other to interoperate and win. A quarterback or coach must be skilled in the fundamentals of the game yet need not be an expert in every facet—just in knowing how the parts interoperate.

The joint force is similar. The services are adept at providing skilled offensive and defensive

players, and from those we select the most qualified to coach our formations. The services remain at the center of the process for developing joint professionals as they retain control and promote their best officers.

Due to the Goldwater-Nichols quality standards for officers in joint billets, service competency has become a prerequisite to the joint transition. These standards provide joint commanders the quality officers from each service, and as they serve in joint billets and train and fight within a joint context, they develop the expertise to fight the joint force. This on-the-job training—practical joint experience—is key to developing the expert knowledge and jurisdiction of the joint professional.

### Joint Assignments

There is no substitute for experiential learning, especially in the joint warfighting profession, which relies on officers bonding by serving in joint organizations charged with accomplishing real-world missions. Joint professionals are expected to cast aside service prejudices. In the process, they learn more about their sister services than is possible in the classroom.

Officers in joint assignments typically serve on three types of staffs: the Office of the Secretary of Defense or Joint Staff in Washington, combatant commander staffs across the globe, or defense agency staffs. Joint task forces are a subset of the second category and are established to accomplish specific missions.

Each of these staffs, however, develops joint officers by enabling them to work with the other services to accomplish military missions, which gives them the expertise to produce and manage joint doctrine, perform joint assignments, and work in other joint jurisdictions.

Additional joint expertise comes from the services' training programs as well as from the Chairman's Joint Training and Exercise Program. Such exercises occur at combat training and flight centers, while others are conducted by JFCOM and other combatant commands. During many of these drills, the services practice their core competencies in the context of joint warfare. These venues increasingly apply combined and joint arms in accomplishing missions on the battlefield.

### Quality Controls

The quality standards in the Goldwater-Nichols Act require that officers serving in joint

billets be promoted at rates equal to or higher than those on service staffs. Furthermore, the act established Congress as the watchdog for monitoring service compliance by requiring annual promotion reports. Although the services continue to miss select portions of the quotas, this problem is generally on the margins, and these joint staffs largely continue to be populated by each of the services' brightest officers. This is due to the assignment process itself, incentives to serve in joint billets, and the growing importance of joint warfare.

The services remain at the center of the assignment process, and since they run their own promotion boards, those they select for advancement are generally the most qualified in their own core competencies. Because the Goldwater-Nichols Act stipulated the promotion rate, assignment detailers are constrained to nominate officers of at least comparable quality to both service and joint assignments. But congressional oversight has caused the services to become risk-averse where jointness is concerned, so the joint staffs routinely receive the higher quality.

Next, Goldwater-Nichols has worked because it incentivizes officers to serve in joint billets. The reasons are threefold. First, officers compete for joint assignments because they bring more status than assignments on service staffs. Second, most joint assignments have an operational flavor that is generally preferred over service staff assignments. Finally, such assignments are required to achieve general or flag rank.

Another reason quality has gravitated to joint staffs is that fighting jointly has become more important, and a service often receives missions in proportion to its participation in planning and execution. A service provides its better officers to joint staffs because it is most able to protect and advance its institutional interests in that environment. Essentially, the services compete so some of their brightest officers have the opportunity to perform in this increasingly important environment. In turn, those officers help the service compete for premier missions.

This profession recognizes that fighting jointly is the only effective way to win in 21<sup>st</sup>-century warfare. There is an active effort to develop and internalize the joint skills needed, and the military must preserve its quality management system. Preserving the system ensures that joint force commanders will continue to receive only the most qualified officers, who

**the services teach the basic skills the joint force requires**





can then contribute to the growing body of knowledge concerning modern warfare.

### Improvements Needed

Given the joint context in which future wars will be decided, the wisest course is to continue managing joint knowledge at the broadest level while diffusing jointness to the lowest level necessary. This provides the widest dissemination of knowledge and prepares the overall force more fully for joint warfare. It also allows for quicker experimentation, validation, and dissemination of emerging ideas to enhance the body of joint knowledge. Finally, it offers the widest base to develop and select joint experts for staff and command positions. Two changes would dramatically help accomplish this.

First, we must better leverage the joint lessons learned (JLL) from previous exercises and operations by establishing a Joint Doctrine and Capabilities Center that links training and

education to joint experimentation and analysis to help inform and shape the development of future joint capabilities. This will ensure that we maintain and properly promulgate the body of expert knowledge our joint profession requires.

Second, we must create more standing joint task forces to confront growing demand. This will better meet combatant command requirements and allow officers to fashion greater capacities for employing all joint instruments while preserving service core competencies. These changes will maintain the joint profession and create conditions where jointness truly becomes the means to more effective military operations.

### Joint Doctrine and Capabilities Center

The first step to establishing more effective processes for incorporating JLL and doctrine is to make JFCOM the standing repository for linking service and joint lessons learned. Further, to properly translate such lessons into doctrine and capability requirements, JFCOM must continue to transform into the Joint Doctrine and Capabilities Center for the joint force. This will improve the development and promulgation of joint doctrine, requirements, and capabilities by allowing the joint force provider to validate them, especially when compared to the complex systems we currently use.

With this authority, JFCOM would formulate, staff, and approve the joint doctrine, requirements, and capabilities the joint force needs. Placing the service component command elements involved in these areas directly under JFCOM would greatly facilitate this.

Air Combat Command and Fleet Forces Command already serve as the JFCOM Air Force and Navy component commands, and they also help develop these services' doctrine and tactical fighter and ship requirements. These commands could be expanded to look more holistically at global requirements to resource the entire air and naval forces while retaining their force provider roles. The Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and the Marine Corps Combat Development Command develop Army and Marine Corps doctrine and requirements, and the components of these commands that perform this mission in a joint context could be transferred to JFCOM to establish joint requirements for land and littoral forces.

For the Army, this would require a fundamental reorganization of both TRADOC and Forces Command, but that may be long



overdue. The other services have developed agile doctrine and requirements shops within their JFCOM component commands that also serve as force providers, and the Army and Marine Corps should as well.

JFCOM provides the most likely place to integrate these functions for the joint force. It is already the joint force provider, integrator, and trainer and serves as the executive agent for joint experimentation. Additionally, the Secretary has used it to gather the lessons learned from recent conflicts—a testament to the importance he places on gathering a joint perspective of future requirements. JFCOM could blend the lessons learned into doctrine and a vision of future capabilities while still allowing the services to compete in both defining and fielding the solution sets.

The solution sets would still need to be reviewed and validated by JROC prior to service acquisition. That would help ensure proper synchronization with other service and joint interoperability requirements. To level the playing field, JFCOM should have a formal seat at JROC to ensure that joint capabilities get equal billing.

The advantages of this system lie in creating standing and dedicated analysts to manage each capability area and having a more impartial joint forum to advance the solution sets. These forums could establish the joint standards each solution set must meet, a step missing from the separate service approaches, and these could be programmed and then procured within the current planning, programming, budgeting, and execution processes already in place.

JFCOM provides a level of impartiality in developing joint doctrine and requirements since it is a joint headquarters. The time has come to permanently assign it the mission of developing the joint doctrine and capabilities the joint force needs.

### Standing Joint Headquarters

Recent operations have shown that the U.S. Armed Forces are still not organized to fully prosecute joint operations. The four-star combatant command headquarters was established as the joint organization that executes enduring missions assigned to unified commanders. For more time-sensitive missions, combatant commanders have the authority to create joint task forces; however, manning them has been ad hoc and strains the services that must provide the personnel. As an example, DOD

had some 35 standing JTFs in 2004. In *Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom* alone, U.S. Central Command was augmented with over 3,000 additional billets it deemed necessary. Judging by the progress, these JTFs appear more permanent than temporary, yet they are still filled in an ad hoc manner.

The time has come for the joint force to be permanently organized at levels lower than the combatant command headquarters. As a start, each of the services' three-star headquarters should be reorganized into joint headquarters. That would establish a repository of deployable joint headquarters capable of meeting the growing demand for such elements without diverting officers from other valid requirements. It would preclude the need to form the JTFs in an ad hoc manner and foster the type of joint capabilities envisioned by the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

Jointness truly is the means to an end—successful military operations. Goldwater-Nichols moved the force dramatically forward by providing the organizational structure and joint officer management system, but it is now time to create a better process for developing and managing joint capabilities and doctrine and for prosecuting joint missions. We do not need to rewrite the Goldwater-Nichols Act to do this. Rather we must codify the lessons of ongoing operations by empowering JFCOM as the Joint Doctrine and Capabilities Center for the joint force and by establishing standing joint task force headquarters from the existing service component headquarters in each geographic and functional combatant command. These efforts will further enhance joint culture, improve joint warfighting, and strengthen the joint profession. **JFQ**

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a description and argument for a new joint profession, see Don M. Snider, "Jointness, Defense Transformation, and the Need for a New Joint Warfare Profession," *Parameters* (Autumn 2003), 17–30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); and Don M. Snider et al., eds., *The Future of the Army Profession* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 6–9, 15, 24–32.

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